

HARMONY FIRE DISTRICT

194 Putnam Pike
Glocester, R.I. 02814

The regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was held at the Harmony Fire Station on **Thursday, August 21, 2014.**

Present: Moderator – Milton Huston, Jr.; Chief Stuart Pearson;
Treasurer – Sandra Owens; Tax Collector/Clerk – Kimberly Barber
Board Members –George Kain, Louise Michaels & James Richards;
Association Representative – Joseph Webster, Vice-President;
Attorney – Fred Mason, Jr.

Absent: Board Member – Raymond Fogarty, Jr. – excused

I. – Meeting Called to Order: 7:08 pm by Moderator Fogarty.

II. – Approval of the minutes from the May 15th & May 22nd meetings:

Moderator Huston asked the board if there were any discrepancies to note on the minutes from the May 15th monthly meeting and the May 22nd emergency meeting. He noted that they had been e-mailed to the board on 8/19/14 for review. If there are no corrections, he would like to call for a motion to accept them.

Louise made a motion to accept the minutes from both the May 15th monthly meeting and the May 22nd emergency meeting. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

III. – Review of Bills:

A check register of bills paid since the last meeting until today's date was provided to all board members in their folder. Moderator Huston asked if there were any comments or questions on these expenses. Kim stated that significant bills paid were Firematic – turn out gear, Shipman's – SCBA's, Amica and Vision. Louise asked about a tax payment made to the Chepachet Fire District? Kim stated this was for the transfer of a tax payment that should have been made to CFD not us.

This is an informational report only and no vote is necessary.

IV. – Treasurer's Report:

Beginning balance May 1st \$517,990.64 and ending balance May 31st \$499,171.70. This month the bills were fairly routine.

Beginning balance June 1st \$499,171.70 and ending balance June 30th \$442,694.53. Being the last month of the fiscal year there were big outlays. Our budget was over spent by about <-\$4,400> in large part due to energy costs and snow removal. It was a tough winter. Sandy stated we should watch the budget a little more closely this coming year. Especially with the new reporting requirements for the state.

Sandy explained that the state has imposed new reporting requirements for fire districts. We must submit report quarterly and annually. First is the tax certification report. Kim stated that a proposed tax levy certification report must be submitted 30 days prior to your annual meeting. Then they are proposing the actual tax levy certification must be submitted 60 days after your tax bills have been mailed. Sandy went on to explain that in addition an adopted budget template must be submitted annually and quarterly reports must also be sent. Kim stated that our first quarterly reports would be due by September 25th. The last item would be an Audit report, which must be formatted according to the state's guidelines. We did

submit an electronic copy of last year's audit to the state already for their review, they were asking everyone to send an example of their audit reports.

Milton asked what we were referring to. Kim clarified for the board. There were two workshops that Kim, Sandy, Chief Pearson, Geoff Malo and members of Chepachet Fire District and West Glocester Fire District attended with the RI Division of Municipal Finance and the RI Auditor General. One was a Pre-Workshop on June 30th before the legislation was finalized and the other was a Workshop on July 30th after the legislation passed. These reporting requirements were imposed in large part due to the recent events at the Central Coventry Fire District. They are still working on these statutes and more changes are expected to be made when the legislators reconvene in November.

Sandy stated that a lot of it is cumbersome, to say the least. A lot more work for her and probably Kim too. We have done part of it already and will do the rest as they come due. There are no penalties for non-compliance yet though. George asked if this is more than is required of the cities and towns. The Chief said that is the problem, it is. He said the RIAFC lobbyist will be meeting with the legislators in November to go over these issues. George said our fire districts should be addressing this with our local elected officials: Chippendale, Fogarty and Winfield. Milton asked Sandy what is so cumbersome. Sandy said that every report must be formatted to their templates. So it is a matter of re-digesting everything. George said that we don't have the political clout of towns and cities to make them back off. Actually the Chief said there are more fire and special districts than cities and towns, more than double. Milton said what we can hope for is that we can get involved and that the changes that they make now will be our changes. George said that we shouldn't all have to change just for the sake of one district. Whatever they did, they did. We have had cities that have failed in the state, but all the other cities did not get retooled. Everyone agreed. The Chief said you are absolutely right and that is the point we are trying to make. We are telling them is that we do not mind doing the same as is required of cities and towns, but not more. Sandy said that this is just too extreme. They have said that they want to approve our choice of auditor. If they do not approve they will pick one. She said absolutely not. I won't pay some big audit company \$5-10,000 for an auditor of their choice. George said personally he feels that there seems to be a move among some politicians to break fire districts in the state. This may just be one of the avenues they are taking. It's not right, changes need to be approved by a vote of the people. Not this way, if that's what's happening.

The Chief said the goal of the RIAFC lobbyists is to meet with the legislators up until November to negotiate. Then in November they will be ready to make appropriate changes. The Sandy said it is obvious they did this on the fly, not a lot of thought was put into it and they should have waited another year until they had more information. Kim said it was imposed, now they are trying to make it work. Reports must be sent to multiple agencies and copies must also be sent to your local town councils. She said she questioned this at the workshops stating we are separate entities, but they had no answer. George said he thinks it is because if the district goes defunct then the town or city has to take over. Somebody has to provide protection, you can't rely on mutual aid. Sandy said well we will just comply as the reports come due. Louise told Sandy that everyone appreciates the extra time she is spending on this. Sandy said that Geoff Malo is also spending a lot of extra time following this.

Milton stated he would be most interested in finding out what they did so wrong in Central Coventry? What do we do that is so different from them? George said that well the first thing we do when we want to buy something is look to Sandy and say how can we pay for this. The Chief said that is exactly what he thinks too, it's the way we conduct business. This is where the states monitoring could be helpful, watching for red flags. Sandy said the moral of this all is she would like to come in a lot under budget this year, barring any emergencies. Our reporting should not send up any flags.

Louise made a motion to accept the May and June Treasurer's reports as presented. Jim seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

V. – Tax Collector’s Report:

Tax bills were mailed August 5th. They were delayed a few days due to an employee turnover at Vision. An ad was placed in the Bargain Buyer, as required, announcing the tax bills had been mailed. The 2014 Tax Levy was \$454,931.65, which is a 2.2% increase from the 2013 Tax Levy, with a Tax Rate of \$1.54 per/thousand dollars of assessed value. While preparing the budget we had estimated the tax levy to be about \$462,000, so this difference could affect the amount to be taken from general funds to balance the budget. The taxes receivable balance as of today’s date is \$391,705.55.

Taxes collected in the month of June totaled \$3,290.95.

Taxes collected in the month of July totaled \$7,519.85.

Tax sale proceedings have begun. The 90 Day Notice letters were mailed on July 24th. Of the 68 parcels receiving letters there are approximately 50 left on the list today.

Third party billing fees collected in the month of June were \$8,263.17.

Third party billing fees collected in the month of July were \$11,433.38.

The Beacon Worker’s Compensation Audit was submitted and our premium has increased by \$25.00.

The Harmony post office box officially closed as of June 30th. Change of address notices have been being made since November. Mail is now being forwarded.

The Firefighters Relief Board is now enforcing that we send them copies of our active rosters annually. This is to ensure firefighters widows get the compensation they deserve. We have complied.

Another new piece of legislation that passed was the “Public Employee Tax Compliance Act”. This statute requires a listing of all “...elected officers, appointed officials and employees...” including their address and social security number be submitted on encrypted CD to RI Division of Taxation annually by August 1st. They will use this list to check and see if any of the individuals listed owe money to the state so they can garnish their wages. Sandy asked if social security numbers were required. Kim said yes. Everyone was very confused. The district board is made up of volunteers, there is no pay involved. Kim said she understood what they were saying, but the legislation had passed and we must comply. Sandy said she knows that they said their offices do not talk to each other, but taxation is a division of revenue. She feels they should be addressing more important issues. Milton said if I don’t pay my taxes they know it, they don’t need another list.

Kim’s annual APRA certification has been submitted. For those not familiar with the term APRA it stands for *Access to Public Records Act*. Every entity needs to have a person or persons certified to address public records requests. She attended the Open Government Summit August 1st with CFD Secretary/Clerk Darlene Shields and WGFD Tax Collector/Treasurer Angela Taylor to gain the CEU’s required for certification. Kim expressed the need for a second person in the district to be certified to ensure compliance. For example should Kim be away on vacation and there is no one available to comply with the request we would be penalized.

Louise made a motion to add the item “Access to Public Records Act Certification” to the agenda for discussion purposes only. George seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

There was much discussion about the need for a second APRA certified person, as well as who should do it. Kim explained that there were 2 ways to become certified. One attend the Open Government Summit or two view the taped recording of the Summit on the Attorney General’s website, print the certificate when complete, have a superior sign it and then mail it in. It was decided to add the item to the agenda for next month so it could be decided then who would become APRA certified. Sandy asked if there is any fee required to attend. Kim said no, not at this time. But as with everything else the AG has reserved the right to assess a fee in the future.

The Chief said Kim has been going to these workshops and she has especially seen in the last couple that they are really cracking down and scrutinizing what we are doing. They are zipping out fines left and right. He believes there were four just last week, not for big items, but they are catching things. He said he knows Kim feels awkward sometimes, but sometimes she must keep us focused in as a working group, to keep us in line and to watch how we say and present things. He accepts that and welcomes it and he would hope we all feel the same.

Kim said that they even require her to submit draft copies of minutes before they are even approved. They must be submitted electronically within twenty-one days of the meeting. There is no time for a board member to say that something is wrong, it is then a public document.

We were even informed at the Summit that our agendas are wrong. We cannot list “Old Business” and “New Business” on them anymore. They are too general and the agendas must be specific to exactly what you are discussing. If a topic needs to be discussed and it is not on your agenda a motion must be made to add it for discussion purposes only then it can be added to the agenda for your next meeting if a vote needs to be taken. Meetings should strictly follow the agenda, move item-to-item and probably be over in about 20 minutes flat.

George asked if Kim knew anything about the boundary line being resurveyed between Glocester and Burrillville. He had heard Harmony tax payer was now being billed by Oakland-Mapleville Fire District. Kim said if there were any abatements processed the Glocester Assessor Jennifer Mooney would send her an official notification of the change. He thinks Glocester should have notified us if there was a boundary dispute and we should look into it. He is afraid we are going to lose taxable property. Sandy commented that there wouldn't be anything we could do about it. Kim said she had not heard anything about it yet though.

Jim made a motion to accept the Tax Collector's report. Louise seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

VI. – Chief's Report:

The Chief first introduced to the board Joe Webster, Association Vice-President. The board welcomed him.

The Chief stated that a few things have gone on over the summer since our last meeting.

In June we participated in the Firemen's Memorial hosted by Chepachet Fire.

We also took part in a regional RIT Drill at Brothers of the Sacred Heart hosted by Harrisville Fire. RIT stands for Rapid Intervention Team. In the event that a firefighter goes down on scene this specialized group would go in after him. We have several members here that are trained in this and attended this large scale drill.

He attended a Glocester Public Safety Meeting to prepare a plan of action for the July 4th Ancients & Horribles Parade which was classified as a level 3 terror threat. Some members of the crew participated in the rainy day parade on the 4th.

The Chief attended NEAFC Conference & Expo. at the Big E in Springfield, MA again this year. All expenses for this 4 day event were paid for by the NEAFC.

The Association hosted its annual cookout at the end of June again this year. The food was great and a great time was had by all.

In July a recall issued for our RTV. It was covered under the warranty and repaired by Norfolk Equipment.

The Chief has been working on some plumbing issues in the building due to the condition of the pipes. We have had someone come in and we need some zone valves replaced that are leaking. We are talking about \$3,500-4,000 for the work to be done, we will be getting a quote. This is one of those things that are unpredictable and not something that we budgeted for. It is the nature of the beast here. They went to fix something in the building the other day, they turned a faucet and it broke right off in their hands. Water went everywhere!

He then thanked Lt. Kevin Farley, who was in the audience, for all of his hard work in obtaining the recently awarded AFG grant for \$40,827. The district's expense will be 5% of the cost. What we submitted the grant for is a new EKG/defibrillator for our rescue. The one we had, a Life Pak 12, had reached the end of its useful life and was in need to be replaced. So after going through all of the necessary steps, we now have in the building a new Life Pak 15 ready for the crew to be trained on, then put in service on our rescue. The board thanked Kevin.

We were also awarded a 50/50 VFA grant for upgrades to dry hydrants in district. The project total was \$2,104 and the district's expense of 50% was \$1,052. This project has been completed over the summer.

Another large grant has been submitted for Recruitment & Retention with Oakland-Mapleville Fire and Harrisville Fire. Awards will be announced in 2015 and if received will be split between the three departments. This grant will help us design a plan go out and recruit new members to the departments and then to keep them. It provides incentives for the new members such as health care, 401(k), child care and higher education that are 100% paid. The grant would pay for their EMT and firefighting training, NFPA approved physicals and turn out gear.

The three Gloucester Fire Chiefs have met with Ron Provost of Motorola several times over the summer to discuss the upgrades to the town-wide radio system. Ron has put together an RFP and the other Chiefs are now bringing the plan back to their boards to discuss. The Chief knows where he wants to go with the project, now he is just waiting for their feedback.

In August the Chief attended the IAFC Conference in Dallas, Texas. The conference was very interesting with educational segments taking place the first three days, then the expo. took place at the end. He was able to take a class on "Recruitment and Retention" which helped to gather more information for the potential grant. Other classes were on "Mentoring" and "Health & Safety of our Volunteers".

The Chief also wanted to thank Joe and take a moment to bring to the board's attention projects that he has been assisting with in-house. He has set up Kim's new computer already and now the Chief has a few more IT projects that he is ready to pull the trigger on and Joe is going to be helping out to get them up and running.

The Chief then took out a book for the board to review, written by Harmony's own Harry Anderson about a fire at his home on that our department responded too. The department is mentioned by name as well as several of our members, including the Chief himself. Harry intends to come in to speak with the crew and sign our copy of his book for our archives.

The step-daughter of deceased member Russell Steere has also come in to the station and donated an old badge and many old fragile scrap books about the department and Harmony area that date back to 1924. These are quite a treasure.

On another note the Chief would like to congratulate Lt. Kevin Farley on becoming the newest member of the Portsmouth Fire Department. There was a round of applause. The Chief went on to say that after all of the years of hard work he never gave up and his dream of becoming a full-time firefighter has finally

come true. No one could be more deserving and many other people can look up to him as an example. The Chief said he was very proud of him and the board agreed wholeheartedly!

There was also a thank you card received from George's wife Stephanie, for a floral arrangement sent on behalf of the district board after her recent surgery. The Chief passed the card around the table for everyone to see.

Also a letter of resignation has been received by the Chief from our long time member Andy Noonan. Andy is graciously stepping aside due to personal health reasons. Another duplicate letter addressed to the district board was passed around for all to read. Everyone wished Andy well.

George wanted to mention that it was Russell Steere that had originally mounted the plaque on the stone outside. He was a Captain in Harmony back then.

Jim made a motion to accept the Chief's report. George seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

VII. – Harmony Fire Department & Improvement Association Report:

Although Joe was here to represent the Association, he did not have a report to present. The report was tabled until next month.

VIII. – Committee Reports:

a. **Broadband Work Team – Milton Huston, Chair**

Milton had seen an article that talked about a software program that Philadelphia is using for all of their municipal communication. They use it send messages out of all sorts, just basic public knowledge. It is called Salesforce.com and is a "Cloud" application. He said he uses it every day. The Chief said that it sounds very similar to the Second Signal program we currently use. Milton said he really hasn't look much into what other cities and towns are using. Milton asked the Chief what our status was with broadband projects right now. He said that currently the RI Foundation and moved its money over to RIEMA and they are looking to where they should invest broadband money. So there may be something happening at the local level there in the future, but he isn't quite sure.

b. **Apparatus Review Work Team – Jim Richards, Chair**

Work Team: Jim, George, Chief, Deputy Chief Segee & Capt. John Falco

Jim reported that ironically today the truck committee had gone to Tri-Star to do the final inspection on the truck. Which now as far as the manufacturer is concerned the truck is complete. Now the way the process works is we go and tell them if it doesn't meet our specifications. The truck did not and that is not uncommon. We have now given them a punch list of 13 items to correct. When they say they have been completed we will do another inspection to see if the corrections have been done to satisfy our requirements. Then we would accept the truck and make payment. Jim would estimate that this process will take about 2-3 weeks. Sandy said so about mid-September you would need the check? Jim said yes, about then. She said she just needed to know because she will have some CD's to close. Milton asked if Tri-Star had any objections to the 13 items. George said no, not really. Jim said an example of one of the items was the font size on some of the graphics.

c. **Property Review Work Team – George Kain & Louise Michaels, Co-Chairs**

George said that he really didn't have any new information to present. The last time we had a meeting we had spoken about looking for funding. He just wanted to know "do we want to do it or not?" The woman keeps calling him and he doesn't know what to say. Milton said that was a fair question. George and Louise stated they had done all they could do as a committee and they needed direction from the board. Sandy asked if the owner seemed

anxious to sell. George said she has sold other properties recently, so he thinks she is ready. She has made it clear that she is not leasing to her tenants so there is nothing binding there. Some discussion followed about steps needed to be taken to figure out our costs to upgrade the septic and water on our property here. Then compare the two expenses. This would not be a cheap thing to do though. Jim said to answer George's question, he is still interested in the property. Sandy said that right now we do have some real financial constraints. We went up on taxes this year and she doesn't know how we could go up to cover this additional expense. Milt said yes, that's the thing, how do we pay for it? Louise said that there is nothing further that she and George can do without further approval from the rest of the board.

Louise then made a motion to go into Executive Session regarding the possible property acquisition pursuant to *RIGL 42-46-5(a)(5)*. Jim seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board recessed for Executive Session at 8:08 pm and the regular meeting reconvened at 8:29 pm.

Jim made a motion to seal the minutes of the Executive Session. Louise seconded it. The motion carried unanimously.

IX. – Old Business:

a. Credit Cards as form of payment for Tax Bills

Sandy asked if we really had to do this. We will lose 2-3% of everything we collect. Jim said that we will not lose anything, the fee is passed on to the tax payers. Sandy said she didn't think that was legal, but OK then. Kim said that when she spoke to Jane Steere she stated that last year out of 31,076 tax payments only 973 were paid by credit card. This year out of 20,777 payments only 814 were. This averages to about 3-4% of her revenue. Any fees were paid by the tax payers. Mostly the charges were for motor vehicles bills. The people that mostly take advantage of credit card payments were people in trouble financially. If it comes to the choice of losing your home or charging a payment they can charge it. Sandy said it does have its good points then. Discussion followed about different credit cards and the fees they charged.

Kim asked if this item could be tabled until next month because she was missing a document.

X. – New Business:

a. Proposed By-Laws changes

Kim said that what was needed were to create new line items in the by-laws to comply with RIGL requirements. A list will be provided to board members in next month's packet to be voted on at that time.

Jim made a motion to add the item "Mobile Home Legislation" to the agenda for discussion purposes only. Louise seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b. Mobile Home Legislation

A copy of this legislation was included in everyone's folders tonight. The legislation increases collections on mobile homes by imposing laws to stop the property from changing hands or even receiving a permit to be demolished, until the taxes are paid in full. The three Gloucester fire districts tax collectors would like to piggy back on this legislation passed for the Town of Gloucester in the last session. This would keep the tax collections consistent throughout the town. This item will need to be added to next month's agenda to be voted on.

XI. – Public Input:

Louise asked the Chief about the light in front of the station. Is the light supposed to be turned red before the apparatus exit the building? The Chief said we had looked into this in the past and it was found that it was safer for the apparatus to proceed with caution, looking both ways, than to hit a light and assume four lanes of travel will stop. The Chief also clarified that the light is actually owned by the RIDOT, not the department. Some discussion followed.

XII. – Executive Session: None called

XIII. – Adjournment:

Jim made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Louise seconded it. The motion carried unanimously. The August meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board was adjourned at **8:40 pm**.

The next meeting of the Harmony Fire District Executive Board
is scheduled for **Thursday, 7:00 pm, September 18, 2014** at the Harmony Fire Station.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kimberly S. Barber".

Kimberly S. Barber
Tax Collector/Clerk